When Mac met Beth: Adaptations of *Macbeth* in 21st-century Greece

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Abstract: This essay approaches four Greek adaptations of *Macbeth* of the 21st century; namely, Raia Mouzenidou's *When Mac Met Beth*, Theodoros Espiritou's *Macbeth. The Bible of Darkness*, Panagiotis Mentis's *The House of Mac-Beth*, and the second part of Ioanna Theou's *Ballad for Dark Souls*, entitled "Lady Macbeth, the Throne of Blood and the Delirium of Ambition".

Résumé : Cet essai approche quatre adaptations de *Macbeth* du 21ème siècle ; plus particulièrement, *Quand Mac a rencontré Beth*, par Raia Mouzenidou, *Macbeth. La Bible de l'obscurité*, par Theodoros Espiritou, *La Maison Mac-Beth*, par Panagiotis Mentis, et la deuxième partie de *La Ballade des âmes perdues*, par Ioanna Theou, avec le titre "Lady Macbeth, le trône de sang et le délire de l'ambition".

Keywords: Modern Greek adaptations of *Macbeth* – Lady Macbeth – Sigmund Freud – Raia Mouzenidou – Theodoros Espiritou – Panagiotis Mentis – Ioanna Theou.

Mots-clés: Adaptations de *Macbeth* grecques modernes – Lady Macbeth – Sigmund Freud – Raia Mouzenidou – Theodoros Espiritou – Panagiotis Mentis – Ioanna Theou.

Macbeth could be listed amongst Shakespeare's most popular plays of the Greek stage since the dawn of modern Greek theatre in the 1860s. Until the turn of the century the play was repeatedly performed in Athens, Constantinople, Smyrna, Ermoupolis (Syros), Patras and Cyprus, and the title role was played by the most prominent actors of the time, such as Pantelis Soutsas, Dionyssios Tavoularis, Dimosthenis Alexiadis, Nikolaos Lekatsas and Dimitrios Kotopoulis (Yanni 248-

276). The most important productions of the 20th century include those by Marika Kotopouli's troupe in 1926, 1937-1938 and 1954-1955; the National Theatre in 1967-1968 and 1981-1982; the National Theatre of Northern Greece in 1971-1972. The productions of the play in the 21st century include a production at the Theatro tou Neou Kosmou in 2006, directed by Giorgos Gallos, with all the parts performed by three actors; Thomas Moschopoulos's production for the Onassis Foundation (Stegi) in 2012; and the most recent productions of the National Theatre of Northern Greece in 2016-2017 and of the National Theatre in 2020.

Recently, the Greek stage also offered a few adaptations of the "Scottish play", all of them written for these particular productions. In two cases the adaptor was also the director of the play. In 2009-2010 Raia Mouzenidou presented *When Mac Met Beth*, one of the many Shakespearean adaptations she has written for her own theatre, Dipylon; in 2015 Theodoros Espiritou presented *Macbeth. The Bible of Darkness*, an adaptation of the play for two actors, at the Michael Cacoyannis Foundation; in 2017 Panagiotis Mentis wrote *The House of Mac-Beth* for a group of actors under the direction of Kostis Kapelonis, who staged the play at the Art Theatre Karolos Koun. To these adaptations we could add a piece of work that has not been staged yet: In 2019 Joanna Theou, a young writer whose dramatic work includes two published plays, wrote a dramatic diptych entitled *A Ballad for Dark Souls*, the second part of which, under the subtitle "Lady Macbeth, the throne of blood and the delirium of ambition", is in fact a long soliloquy of Lady Macbeth.

Mouzenidou and Espiritou made generous cuts to Shakespeare's text, but did not add much material of their own. Theou wrote a monologue that is largely based on Shakespeare's depiction of the Macbeths, and only changed a few details. Mentis was the only writer who kept a few basic elements from Shakespeare and wrote a whole new play. Of the four plays only Mouzenidou's and Mentis's are published; the other two works were kindly given to me by the authors. This article will attempt to provide a brief overview of these recent adaptations of *Macbeth* and trace their relevance –if any– to the reality of 21st-century Greece.

When Mac Met Beth, by Raia Mouzenidou

In the theatre season of 2009-2010 Raia Mouzenidou presented *When Mac Met Beth*, her own adaptation of *Macbeth*, at her theatre, Dipylon. Mouzenidou had worked with Shakespeare before, with her *Speaking of Shakespeare: Call Me Juliet* (2003), a play she wrote about a troupe playing Shakespeare's famous love tragedy; *Romeo and Juliet* (2003-2004); and *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot* (2005-2006), based on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and *Romeo and Juliet*. After *When Mac Met Beth* she staged more plays by Shakespeare, in her own translations-adaptations: *Everything Is War. Troilus and Cressida: Second Shot* (2010), another adaptation on *Troilus and Cressida*; *With Shakespeare's Measure* (2011-2012), her adaptation of *Measure for Measure*; *11+1 Nights=Twelfth Night* (2016), a musical adaptation of *Twelfth Night*.[1]

Mouzenidou cut down both Shakespeare's text and characters. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, Macduff's wife and son, as well as other secondary characters (Rosse, Angus, Lennox etc.), were eliminated. The director kept the basic parts, and distributed them among five actors, including herself. *When Mac Met Beth* is divided into seventeen scenes –and no acts. On several occasions Shakespeare's scenes are synopsized, often by voices off stage. On the whole, having cut several scenes, mostly involving secondary characters and events, Mouzenidou kept Shakespeare's original, in her own translation.

In her director's note in the programme of *When Mac Met Beth* Mouzenidou admits that "[t]he adaptation and the production took seriously into consideration Freud's observation that Macbeth and his Lady constitute a uniform character split into two dramatis personae" (Mouzenidou 2009: n.p.). Mouzenidou obviously refers to Sigmund Freud's essay "*Some Character-types Met with in Psycho-analytic Work*" (1916), where he applies to *Macbeth* an idea he found in an unpublished study by Ludwig Jekels: Jekels "believes that Shakespeare often splits a character up into two personages, which, taken separately, are not completely understandable and do not become so until they are brought together once more into a unity" (Freud 323). This also justifies the fact that Mouzenidou split the name of Macbeth into

two (Mac and Beth) in the title of the play –and not only there. Although in the dramatis personae the couple is still Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and despite the fact that the rest of the characters use the name Macbeth, Mouzenidou's couple address each other as Mac and Beth, which somehow puts them in a world of their own.

The elimination of characters, scenes and lines by Mouzenidou gave the story of the Macbeths a faster pace, and made it more focused on the major characters, and the Macbeths in particular. After all, as A. C. Bradley remarks, these "two great terrible figures [. . .] dwarf all the remaining characters of the drama" (292). The couple is seen as a unity even after Beth's death. Although the play closes with Macbeth's murder by Macduff (the last lines heard are Macbeth's last words to Macduff, which are given to the latter), the last stage direction, which follows, reads "*They fight, Macbeth falls. The lights go off with the bodies of Mac and Beth, united in the eternal night*" (Mouzenidou 2011: 70).

Besides her Freudian approach of the play's central characters, Mouzenidou presented *Macbeth* as a dark tale. The music by Stavros Mitropoulos of the group Dirty Granny Tales, performed live by the composer, created an ominous, "gothic" (Galanopoulou) atmosphere, and the use of puppets, designed by Dimitris Stamos, also added to the creation of Mouzenidou's gloomy world. However, Freud's impact on the study of Shakespeare's characters remains as the central idea of Mouzenidou's adaptation, and this was also the main topic of a discussion with the audience, which she organised after one of the performances.

Macbeth. The Bible of Darkness, by Theodoros Espiritou

In May 2015 Theodoros Espiritou presented his own version of *Macbeth* at the Michael Cacoyannis Foundation in Athens: it was an adaptation with the subtitle *The Bible of Darkness*, based on his own translation of the Shakespearean text.[2] Espiritou's adaptation is divided into five parts following, more or less, Shakespeare's act division. However, *The Bible of Darkness* is a play for two. The whole plot is narrated or enacted by the Macbeths, who provide a very personal and internalized version of the story. Thus, the battle is described in

Macbeth's letter, along with his meeting with the witches; Lady Macbeth is informed about her husband's upcoming arrival by an invisible messenger; a dialogue between Macduff and Lennox is given in indirect speech; Macduff's reaction to Duncan's murder is reported to Macbeth by his wife; the princes' flight is discussed between the couple; Macbeth addresses an invisible Banquo and an invisible murderer; the banquet scene is played with no guests; the apparitions are only heard, etc.

With the absence of all the other characters, Macbeth and his Lady appear in a separate world, a universe that rotates around their desires, obsessions and nightmares. As Espiritou explains, his Macbeths "live and breathe without the frame of place and time", located "in some kind of Purgatory, where they incessantly repeat –as another Sisyphean torture– the murder they once committed" (Espiritou, "Power…"); "their frozen palace is transformed into a mental landscape of painful awareness and unspeakable horror".[3] The subtitle of Espiritou's adaptation seems to allude to the "murky background" of the play which is "continued into [the Macbeths'] souls" (Bradley 292).

Espiritou connects the couple's deeds with their personal life: For the Macbeths the acquisition of the throne could be seen as a means to fill the gap of an absent child (Espiritou, "Power…"). The value of a child as successor and heir and the price of a child's loss are stressed by the director, who made a couple of interesting changes regarding the characters' offspring. In Shakespeare's play (1.7.54)[4] Lady Macbeth mentions that she has "given suck" (which means that she has given birth first), but it is not clear what has become of her child –or children–, whom we regard as dead, considering Macduff's line "He has no children" (4.3.217), most probably referring to Macbeth.[5] In Espiritou's version Lady Macbeth has given birth to a stillborn child. Apart from this alteration, there is another one regarding Macduff's children. In *The Bible of Darkness* there is only one (a son), whereas Shakespeare uses plural for Macduff's offspring on several occasions.[6] However, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* only one of Macduff's children (a son) appears onstage, which justifies Espiritou's idea of Macduff's only son.

In Espiritou's play of obsession and loss Macbeth and his Lady are somehow seen as one person, which once more alludes to Freud's essay "*Some Character-types Met with in Psycho-analytic Work*" mentioned above. In Espiritou's adaptation the Macbeths figure as "twin embodiments of Evil".[7] Nikos Pantelidis, who played Macbeth, also talks about "these two pieces of one and only person, one and only creature" (Pantelidis). This idea of the two characters seen as one is also detected in the way Espiritou splits the parts between the two characters. It all starts with Macbeth's letter, half read by his Lady and half uttered by himself. Lady Macbeth also shares her husband's original part on other occasions, such as the lines addressed to Banquo before the banquet.

Espiritou keeps the idea of the couple as one person until the end of his play, where Lady Macbeth's last lines of madness alternate with her husband's lines on the way to his fall. Unlike Shakespeare's play, where Lady Macbeth's death is reported, in *The Bible of Darkness* she dies in Macbeth's hands, which depicts even better the collapse of the inseparable couple, with Lady Macbeth's death followed by Macbeth's fall.

Espiritou's idea of these twin figures of the Macbeths, underlined in the production by the similarity of their costumes (by Assi Dimitrolopoulou) and their choreographed movements (designed by Pauline Huguet), was successfully communicated to the audience. As Georgia Aggouridaki [Γεωργία Αγγουριδάκη] synopsizes in her review in *Athinorama*, Macbeth and his Lady work as a "reflective couple": "He speaks with female revulsion about violence, where She pushes him. She is pregnant with and eventually gives birth to a 'male' nature, which He seeks" ("*Macbeth*").

The House of Mac-Beth, by Panagiotis Mentis

In October 2017 Panagiotis Mentis's *The House of Mac-Beth*, a new play based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, was first presented at the Art Theatre Karolos Koun.[8] The play was written especially for a group of three actors (Gianna Malakate, Iro Kosti and Giorgos Stavrianos) who wanted to work together –and with director Kostis Kapelonis. The latter confided to Ivi Vassiliou that the original idea, before they

asked Mentis to write a new play, was to create an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for three actors, featuring the Macbeths and a witch ("Kostis Kapelonis…"). Mentis did write a play for three, and two of the characters were obviously the Macbeths; however, he chose for his third character a prostitute that comments on the politics of a world she knows too well, a figure that is "metaphysical and familiar at the same time" (Kapelonis 7), who ends up as a help for Beth (Lady Macbeth's counterpart) towards the end of the play. However, even this non-Shakespearean character of Mentis's play alludes to a Shakespearean motif: that of the character that moves in the periphery of society (as does the Bastard in *King John* or Jacques in *As You Like It*), commenting ironically or bitterly on contemporary politics or morals.

In his prologue to the play Mentis refers to his source:

> The couple MAC-BETH is the eternal reference to desire and passion for power. The procedures of conquest are nightmarishly predetermined in the before and after of the existence of the monstrous "House", whose story was written by Shakespeare, who recorded with psychoanalytical mastery the underground and mysterious paths that the brain transforms into actions (Mentis 2017b: 5).

However, unlike Mouzenidou or Espiritou, Mentis moves away from the when and where of Shakespeare's play, and defines the dramatic time of the play as "today", and the place as "any country" (Mentis 2017a: 8). In his note for the programme Kapelonis regards Mentis's play as a "political, psychological thriller about modern European political reality" (Kapelonis 7); in an interview the director also described the play as "a political thriller about post-democratic society" ("Kostis Kapelonis…"). In Mentis's text the references to modern politics involve the European Parliament, terrorism, the power of the media etc., and in his prologue to the play the playwright defines what seems to be the attitude of a modern political leader: "The next day never interests the professional of power. The moment of conquest is his own eternity" (Mentis 2017b: 5).

However, Kapelonis also traces the timelessness of the story: "In a scenery of the near future but also of the dark Middle Ages the ascent

to power, the conquest of the crown or the leadership of the party has had the same rules for centuries" (Kapelonis 7). Elsewhere he adds:

> The democracy of the Western world is pregnant with the danger of its abolishment, while next to it still survive obscurantist and barbarous remnants of an obscurantist past that refuses to disappear. There are times when I think that the world, instead of going forward, goes at full speed towards some neo-medieval period ("Kostis Kapelonis…").

In her review of the production Tonia Karaoglou noted that the show oscillated between Shakespeare and the television series *House of Cards* (Karaoglou). Indeed, in spite of its modern setting, words like "crown" (Mentis 2017a: 14, 19), "throne" and "queen" (20), "battlefield" and "massacre" (14) etc. are found in the play, and allude to the era depicted in the original play.

Small excerpts from (or echoes of) the Shakespearean text are found here and there in Mentis's play. The playwright also used an excerpt from Michael Damiralis's 1905 translation (written in some kind of archaic Greek), namely part of Macbeth's monologue after Duncan's murder, about the king's guards and the voices in his mind. The "If we fail?" dialogue is also there, somewhat altered, and so is Lady Macbeth's claim that she would kill her own child if it were an obstacle to their ascent, as well as her berating of her husband for his cowardice. Moreover, Mentis keeps the motif of the permanent, unwashable blood stains on the hands of the murderer. Particular elements of the plot are also found in Mentis's text: Mac calls Beth from the airport on his way home (which reminds us of Macbeth's letter to Lady Macbeth before his arrival); the couple invites the Leader of the party to their home, with a plan to kill him; the Leader's son is supposed to succeed him in the leadership of the party; Mac's close friend is called Bank (obviously Banquo's counterpart), and has a son, too; both the Leader and Bank die under mysterious circumstances; towards the end of the play Beth is found in a wheelchair, and the prostitute, who now takes care of her, comments on her troubled sleep.

Like Mouzenidou and Espiritou, Mentis also creates a couple that act as one person, which is also clear in his text: "I will kiss you and then

I will eat you, I will devour you. You won't exist after that. I will bear you inside me. You will be me", Beth says to Mac (Mentis 2017a: 13). Unlike Shakespeare's Macbeth, who "isolates himself more and more, even from his wife and accomplice" after the first crime (Ploritis 131), Mentis's Mac keeps working with his wife on the crimes that follow. Moreover, Lady Macbeth does not die; although her health seems fragile at the end of the play, she is still in charge of her husband's affairs.

Despite the fact that the couple act as one person, it is evident that Beth is leading Mac, the way her Shakespearean counterpart does with her husband, at least in the beginning of the play. "Lady Macbeth has to guide, protect and mother her husband", E. A. I. Honigmann observes, and adds that at times Macbeth's voice sounds "pitifully human, and almost child-like" (127). This mother-child relation between Beth and Mac is articulated in Mentis's text:

> HE [MAC]: [. . .] How much yours am I?... I was born by another woman…
>
> SHE [BETH]: Show me a picture of her! Lead me!... Come, give me your hand, and let's go, show her to me!... She is nowhere, honey!... Maybe she was in a grave, but they dug it up! They broke the cross with her name on it. And her photograph, along with remorses and other secrets, was thrown into the digester… I gave birth to you, baby!... I, who made you my husband! (Mentis 2017a: 25)

Later on, Macbeth himself admits: "You shouldn't be my wife; you should be my mother" (30). As Janet Adelman observes,

> Maternal power in *Macbeth* is not embodied in the figure of a particular mother (as it is in *Coriolanus*); it is instead diffused throughout the play, evoked primarily by the figures of the witches and Lady Macbeth. Largely through Macbeth's relationship to them, the play becomes (like *Coriolanus*) a representation of primitive fears about male identity and autonomy itself, about those looming female presences who threaten to control one's actions and one's mind, to constitute one's very self, even at a distance (130-131).

The fact that Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth has no child of her own (although she obviously lost at least one) makes it easier for her to

focus on her husband. Michael Mangan comments: "there is a special significance to the fact that Macbeth and his wife are left childless. On a personal level the detail serves to increase the sense of their isolation and lovelessness" (210). For Mentis's Beth, remaining childless is her own choice, which she connects with Mac's weakness:

> SHE: If I had a child with you and felt that it was an impediment to what we have planned together, to our final goal, I'm telling you, I wouldn't hesitate to…
> HE: We are young, and heavy words, big words, can be forgotten, we may regret we uttered them…
> SHE: That's why I didn't have a child with you!
> HE: Trust brings children to the couple.
> SHE: That's what I'm saying. (Mentis 2017a: 29)

Beth seems to fear Mac's inconsistency, which is also evident in Shakespeare's play. As Imtiaz Habib observes, Macbeth oscillates between two identities, that of the "haunted sinner" and that of the "hardened criminal" (112). Honigman even argues that "[j]ust before the murder of Duncan and immediately afterwards Macbeth impresses us as a victim rather than a villain" (133). Moreover, Bruce R. Smith notes that "[t]ragedy portrays the female other as a destructive force", listing Lady Macbeth among Shakespeare's "destructive" women (113), and Philippa Berry maintains that Lady Macbeth's "incitement of her husband to regicide affords an implicit personification of Fortune's 'housewifery'" (119). However, apart from personifying Macbeth's destructive fortune, Lady Macbeth still has ambitions of her own, and so does Beth. Mentis's Lady Macbeth may not trust her husband, but she still thinks that she can manipulate him. And so she does, in order to achieve her own goals: "I was nothing and I had to be… something… I had the credentials… And he had nothing… and no credentials" (Mentis 2017a: 51). "A skilful woman acquires a man to act on her behalf", Juliet Dusinberre argues (283), and this seems to be the case with Mentis's Beth.

Beth seems to be more involved in politics than her Shakespearean counterpart; still, Lady Macbeth is often connected with politics in modern writings. As John O'Connor observes,

> These days, any politician's wife who dares to deviate for a moment from her allotted doormat status, and whose career background, wit and professional skills ought to recommend her as a potentially valuable helpmeet, will sooner or later be labelled 'the Lady Macbeth of…' (Downing Street, the White House, Fleet Street … fill in as required), her alleged influence suspected as being both sinister and dangerously unaccountable (178).

O'Connor also talks of the way the media have dealt with the figure of Lady Macbeth:

> It is curious that, of all the things Lady Macbeth might have become famous for in the four centuries since her first appearance –blood-soaked palms, sleep-walking, self destruction– the one that has captured the media's imagination most vividly is the notion that she plays the determined, manipulative wife behind the ambitious yet weak man (178).

The power of the media is evident throughout Mentis's play –the journalists waiting at the airport (Mentis 2017a: 11); the news on television (11); the scandals (11, 14)–, and Mac and Beth seem to be always prepared for occasional interviews that would disclose their personal life.

Unlike her Shakespearean sister, Beth stays alive until the end of the play. Like Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, who delivers the Epilogue as a boy actor, Beth utters her own epilogue as an actress in her last appearance in the play, a scene before the very last one:

> I declared from the start that I would leave the troupe if… I refuse to play my death onstage. I even refuse the insinuation that I left offstage. I don't know what was written by the writers that were posthumously declared as classics. But I personally, as a role and as an actress, "embarked"!... A condition that leaves open the participation in action any time, as well as the possibility for the heroine that I play to be a protagonist in a sequel of the play… I embarked, naturally with a destination; a country outside the Schengen Area, of course, which I will not reveal, naturally… (Mentis 2017a: 57).

Beth is not dead at the end of the play; she has just traveled to what seems to be an off-shore tax haven, in order to take care of Mac's financial affairs until he joins her.

Beth's metadramatic reference is not the only one in *The House of Mac-Beth*. The play begins and ends with the same soliloquy about

life as a stage, uttered in the beginning of the play by the actor playing Mac while he is getting dressed for the part, and at the end by the prostitute in the street:

> People fill their lives only with shadows. Their random and meaningless life… Life… Do you know what life looks like to me?... Like a chance for an actor… He gives his soul defending his role… And then the curtain falls, and what remains is… life. And he lives life in regret, shouting in anger, because he learnt and he knows. He has seen history… History repeating itself… Because this is history's work… And what about the artist?... The actor?... Artists have always been its shadows… Its minimal traces… (Mentis 2017a: 58)

A Ballad for Dark Souls, by Joanna Theou

In her first two published plays (*Klytaemnestra-Cassandra: "In the Ebb of Darkness"* and *Heroes on a Stoppage*) Joanna Theou was inspired by ancient Greek mythology and drama. Her next dramatic attempt (not yet published) was inspired by Shakespeare. *A Ballad for Dark Souls* is a diptych involving two of Shakespeare's most famous characters: Iago and Lady Macbeth. The first part, with the subtitle "Iago, the Delirium of a Devil", is set in a dungeon, where the imprisoned Iago expresses his thoughts. The second part of the diptych bears the subtitle "Lady Macbeth, the Throne of Blood and the Delirium of Ambition". Once Iago has delivered his long soliloquy in the first part of the play, the stage rotates and Lady Macbeth appears on a throne for the second part. She is clad in black, wears a crown and holds a scepter. At her feet lies an abandoned sword. Lady Macbeth addresses at first the invisible Macbeth; she also addresses the scepter; but, most of all, she confides to the audience.

In her play Theou keeps basic elements of the Macbeths' character: Lady Macbeth's ambition and her criticism of her husband, Macbeth's inhibitions etc. are all there. Theou's Lady Macbeth is practical and cynical, just like her Shakespearean model. The "unimaginative literalness", which Honigmann describes as Lady Macbeth's state of mind (128) is also evident here, from the beginning of the monologue: the heroine admits that, at first, when her husband wrote to her about the Weird Sisters, she thought that he was mad –although she says that

she herself was approached by a witch when she was a child. However, this Lady Macbeth also has other characteristics.

Theou's Lady Macbeth retains some superficial elements of femininity. She admits that, although she has already made plans for the beginning of the Macbeths' reign, she has not decided yet what to wear on the coronation day. In that respect, she says, she is "a woman a hundred percent". The heroine reproduces a female stereotype, though a woman herself; perhaps her masculinity makes her use these sexist stereotypes of women. On the other hand, and this may have to do with Macbeth's "femininity" (if we consider that his Lady questions his manliness), she argues that Macbeth himself decides what to wear at the last minute. As Marilyn French remarks, "[t]here is an ambiguity about gender roles in *Macbeth*" (242), and this is more than evident in Theou's play, too.

Every now and then, Theou's Lady Macbeth refers to a woman's fragile place in a patriarchal world, and seems to know how to deal with it to her benefit. At the same time, she comments on how useless men can be if not supervised by women, and even refers to Macbeth as her puppet. On the whole, Theou presents a Lady Macbeth who knows how to survive, no matter what: "If Macbeth's plan succeeded, I would be queen. If it failed, Macbeth would lose his head, and I would get rid of him. I would play innocent", she says. Tina Krontiris remarks that "[t]he main reason why the text loads Lady Macbeth with monstrous characteristics is in order to support Macbeth's substance as a tragic hero" (35). However, Theou made some vital changes to the story regarding this part. Apparently, her Lady, who seems much more cautious than Shakespeare's, opposed to Macbeth's idea to kill Duncan: "Macbeth, he is old, he'll die soon" are her words to her husband. This Lady insists that the plan was her husband's, and only his. However, like her Shakespearean counterpart, she also takes part in it. As for her own plans, they involved, as she says, the first one and a half years of their reign. "Don't listen to what Shakespeare wrote!", Theou's heroine says. "He read Aeschylus, and was affected by him. And he made me like Clytaemnestra", she concludes. Theou's Lady is more cynical than Shakespeare's, who, as Honigmann admits, also has "a few moments" when she deviates from her cynical self (128); about

the notorious bloodstains on her Shakespearean sister's hands she says: "No big deal! You wash them with soap, and away with them!".

Unlike Shakespeare's Lady, who seems shocked by the subsequent murders, although she has started this chain of blood with Duncan's, Theou's Lady is bored. She informs us that almost all of their enemies are dead, and the rest of them are exiled. "No more intrigues, no more scheming. My life is empty. And my puppet is half-mad". And yet, in spite of her cynicism, Theou's Lady Macbeth admits that she can still see the eyes of those killed by her husband and herself. She leaves holding a rope, "to choke nightmares, if needed".

A brief comparison

In all the adaptations of *Macbeth* mentioned above the playwrights/directors eliminated the secondary characters and focused on the Macbeths. This is also the case with Mouzenidou, who kept more characters than just the couple, but still focused on the latter. The rest of the plays feature both or just one of the Macbeths, concentrating on the relationship between them.

Mouzenidou and Espiritou stuck to Shakespeare's text, although they made cuts or turned the original into indirect speech, making just a few additions of their own. Theou, on the other hand, changed some basic elements of the two leading characters, making Macbeth a little weaker and his Lady somewhat stronger, and created a text of her own, from Lady Macbeth's point of view. Mentis is the only one who follows Shakespeare's plotline but locates the characters in a modern setting, although he seems to stress the similarities between 21st-century politics and Shakespeare's medieval political setting.

Both Mouzenidou and Espiritou made Lady Macbeth's presence stronger, the former partly by leaving her onstage until the end of the play and the latter mostly by making her share more with her husband, including his Shakespearean lines. However, Theou and Mentis made the character itself much stronger than Shakespeare's original, an element also found in more adaptations of the play, such as Eugène

Ionesco's play *Macbett* (where Lady Macbeth is actually the former Lady Duncan, who spurred Macbeth to murder Duncan), written in 1972, or the quite older (1865) novella *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, by Nikolai Leskov (where Katerina commits several murders). Mentis's Beth could also be compared to Claire Underwood from *House of Cards*, or Mellie Grant from *Scandal*, both characterized as modern versions of Lady Macbeth. However, Mentis's fictional Beth seems to have sisters in real life: female politicians like Theresa May or Labour's Yvette Cooper have been seen as Lady Macbeth's counterparts in modern politics. It seems, then, that with or without a modern setting, *Macbeth* is still topical –and Lady Macbeth seems to overshadow her husband.

The adaptations of *Macbeth* and 21st-century Greece

Shakespeare's dramatic works have occasionally been connected with modern Greek politics, starting with the Greek National Theatre's production of *Henry V* in March 1941, in honour of the British allies. In the 21st century new parallels were drawn between Shakespeare's plays and the Greek socio-political reality, on both stage and page, especially during the Greek financial crisis.[9] However, of the adaptations of *Macbeth* mentioned above only Mentis's reflects contemporary politics –in Greece or elsewhere. As Chara Bakonikola observes, most of Mentis's plays deal, among other things, with "the social game of antagonism, success and dominance" (278-279), and his adaptation of *Macbeth* is no exception. In a brief talk I had with the playwright before the show on the day of the premiere, he told me that his Mac could be Greece's prime minister. Nevertheless, the spectators' reviews in *Athinorama* did not mention the modern social and political references of the play ("*The House of Mac-Beth*"). Other reviewers, on the contrary, did not fail to discuss the socio-political character of Mentis's adaptation, with reference to contemporary European reality (Bouras; Massara).

Joanna Theou in her play *Heroes on a Stoppage*, published in 2018, includes clear references to at least two Greek prime ministers of the last few years (Alexis Tsipras and George Papandreou), as well as more mentions of particular socio-political issues of 21st-century Greece,

such as fiscal austerity measures or the European troika. However, in her *Ballad for Dark Souls* she chose to talk about the timeless issues of power, without any particular references to contemporary Greek socio-political reality.

When Raia Mouzenidou was asked by Elena Galanopoulou about how Shakespeare should be adapted today in order to be more modern, the director replied that what she always tries to do is focus on an idea from the text that she wants to stress (which may or may not be directly related to modern reality) and choose the parts of the original text that will enable her to present a shorter, more focused version of the story (Galanopoulou). In other words, Mouzenidou seems to trace in the modern spectator a desire for brevity and condensed meaning. Indeed, the director's focus on "some of the themes" of the play was obviously appreciated by Aspa [Άσπα], as was the production's length (80 minutes) by Alexandros [Αλέξανδρος] ("*When Mac Met Beth*"). On the other hand, Maria [Μαρία] found the discussion on Shakespeare and Freud after the production she watched most enlightening ("*When Mac Met Beth*").

Theodoros Espiritou's reference to modern Greek reality was found not in his adaptation or staging itself, but rather in an interview he gave to Elissavet Stamopoulou; it was a modest mention of the difficulties of his production, which started literally with zero budget ("I Believe…"). It is of note that during the last couple of decades Greek directors opt for plays with fewer parts, which is not irrelevant to the financial hardships encountered by theatre practitioners. Nevertheless, Espiritou concludes that he will "keep dreaming of a better world, inside and outside the theatre" ("I Believe…").

Shakespeare's dramatic works have always been an inspiration for modern Greek playwrights and theatre practitioners, and *Macbeth* is no exception. Moreover, Shakespeare's plays have been connected with critical moments of Greek history, including World War II or the 1967-1974 dictatorship. Inevitably, parallels were also drawn with 21st-century Greece, in articles, theatre productions and new plays by Greek playwrights. In the case of *Macbeth*, such a play is Panagiotis Mentis's *House of Mac-Beth*.

However, a clearly drawn parallel between the Shakespearean original and modern reality (Greek or other) is not necessarily needed. Raia Mouzenidou argues that "Shakespeare's dramatic work […] is very modern", and she explains that a modern adaptation of a Shakespearean play should not necessarily include clear allusions to our own world, because the timeless issues raised by Shakespeare in his dramatic work concern us anyway (Galanopoulou). Personally, I couldn't agree more.

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1 For more on Mouzenidou's work see Georgopoulou 2013 and 2014.

2 For more on this production see Georgopoulou 2016.

3 From the press release of the play.

4 The references to act, scene and line follow the compact edition of the Oxford Complete Works.

5 Although Bradley argues that Macduff may refer to Malcolm (423-424).

6 See the multiple references to Macduff's children in 4.3.

7 See note 3.

8 For more on this production see Georgopoulou 2017.

9 For more on Shakespeare and modern Greek politics see Georgopoulou 2018 and 2020.